WITH HELPFUL TIPS & TRICKS FOR BEGINNERS

ready, set, BAKE!

36 SWEET & SAVORY RECIPES

S'mores Cookies page 38

Yummy!

FROM THE EDITORS OF Parade

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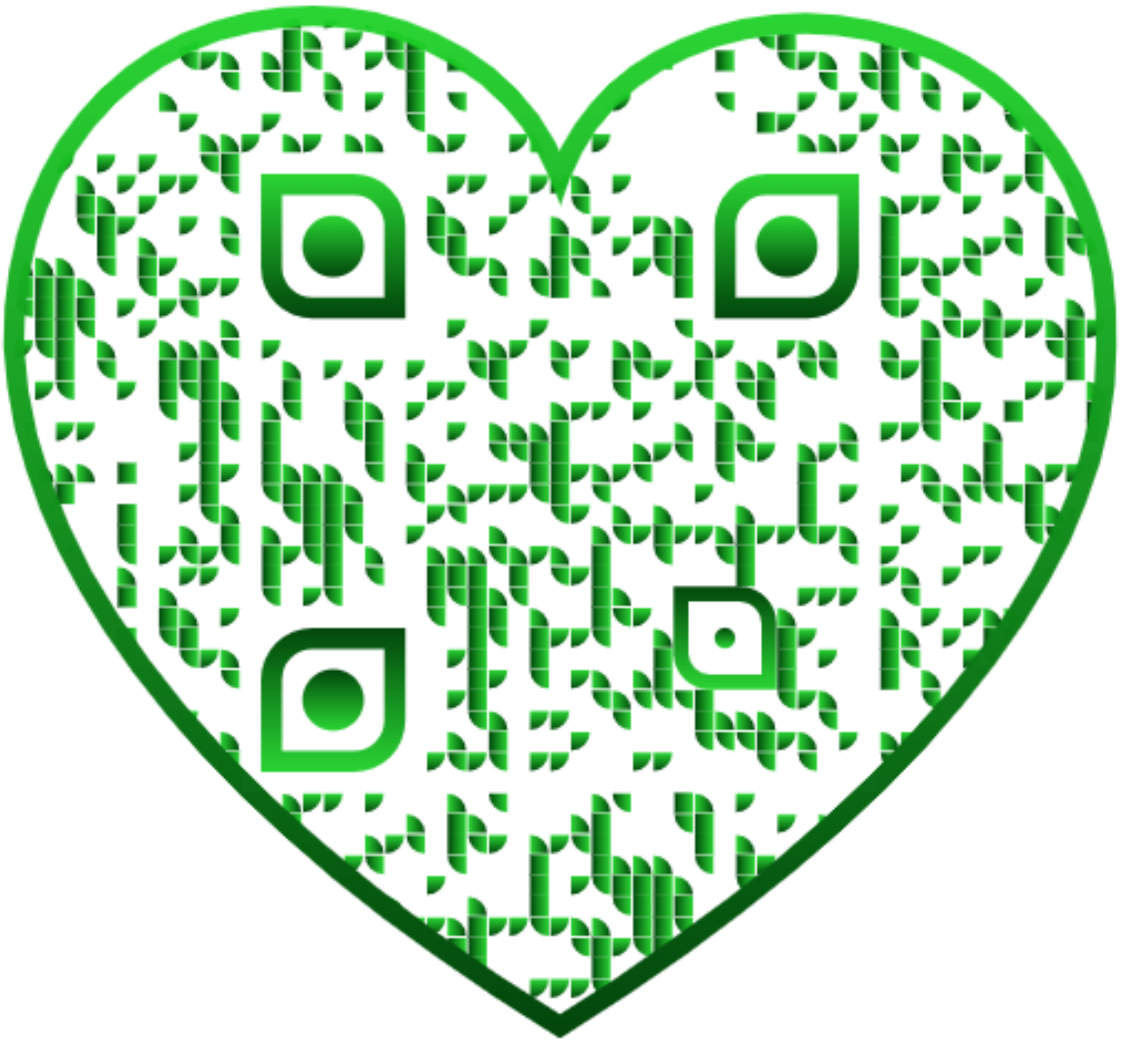

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ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS & STOCKING THE PANTRY

Here is a listing of some necessary ingredients in a baker's pantry. It's not all-inclusive, but it covers the most important items commonly used in baking:

Baking Powder and Baking Soda. Baking powder is a leavener that makes cakes, bread, and cookies rise. Double-acting baking powder works, as its name implies, twice. It first gives off carbon-dioxide gas when it is mixed with liquid, then it reacts a second time when placed in the oven. Baking powder loses some power after three months, and it's inexpensive enough to replace regularly. Baking soda is another leavener that works when combined with an acidic food product. Carbon dioxide gas is produced when baking soda meets ingredients like buttermilk, cream of tartar, honey, chocolate, and fruit, resulting in a fluffy texture.

Chocolate. It's no wonder chocolate was once used as currency for trade, was a drink of the gods, and a medicine to cure ailments. Cacao beans are harvested, dried, cleaned, roasted, and winnowed (when the bean shells are separated from the "nib" or meat inside). Then they are crushed and heated and cacao butter is extracted. This chocolate liquor is then transformed into many different types of chocolate.

Unsweetened chocolate is often in a small brick of chocolate liquor that has been compressed and solidified. It is usually about 45 percent cocoa butter.

Semisweet chocolate has some sugar added to chocolate liquor that is then solidified.

Chocolate chips are semisweet chocolate bits that can be substituted for semisweet chocolate using the same weight.

Store chocolate in a cool place—but not in the refrigerator. If chocolate is stored in a place that is too warm, some of the oils may rise to the surface or "fat bloom." These grayish white areas are okay, and the chocolate is still usable.

Cocoa powder. Unsweetened cocoa powder undergoes more processing where, during the final extraction, more cocoa butter is removed. The resulting chocolate liquor is then transformed into a fine powder. Dutch process cocoa has been treated with alkali to lessen the bite or bitter taste.

Cornstarch. Cornstarch is derived from corn and is used as a thickening agent. Cornstarch, aka corn flour, should be stored in a cool, dry place. It is used often in fruit pies, tarts, and sauces. The resulting thickened mixture often has a silky texture and translucent sheen.

Extracts. Vanilla is the most used extract in baking. For many bakers, it is difficult to distinguish the difference between pure vanilla and synthetic vanilla in the final products. However, when feasible, use the "pure" extracts, as these have the most genuine flavors. Pure vanilla extract is made from vanilla beans soaked in an alcohol solution. Brands of extracts will slightly vary in their flavor; select the one you like best.

Butter. While any brand of butter will work for the recipes, butter with a higher fat content (i.e., 82 or 88 percent) will have more flavor, particularly in recipes like buttercream frosting. Should you use salted or unsalted butter? In most homemade recipes, using either is simply a matter of taste.

Flour. There are a variety of flours available and here is an explanation of the ones used in the recipes that follow.

All-Purpose Flour. All-purpose flour is, as its name suggests, used for most recipes in one's kitchen. It is made from several hard- and soft-wheat flours yielding a protein content between 10 and 12 percent. The protein content of the flours determines the gluten strength. The gluten sheets in dough are then expanded by the by-products of yeast. All-purpose flour varieties include bleached and unbleached. Choose based on your personal preference; they offer nearly identical results.

Bread Flour. Flour with a protein content higher than 12 percent is bread flour. The proteins develop strong gluten in the dough for excellent flavor, chewy texture, and crisp crusts in breads.

Whole Wheat Flour. As its name suggests, whole wheat flour is made from the entire (or whole) wheat berry: the outer bran, the germ, and the heart of the berry. In contrast, all-purpose flour is made from just the inside. Whole wheat flours are heartier and have a nuttier flavor. They also don't store as well at room temperature for long periods. Normal storage should be in an airtight container in a cool and dark place. But, if you aren't going to use all your whole wheat flour within a month or so, store it in the freezer.

Yeast. Yeast is a living fungus that "comes alive" when combined with flour and liquid. It reacts with the starch in flour by converting it to sugar, followed by carbon dioxide gas and alcohol. In breads, the bubbles get captured by the dough in the gluten, making the bread rise. The ideal temperature for yeast to become active in water is between 105°F and 115°F. If the water temperature reaches 120°F, the yeast will start to die. For ease, work with instant or "rapid-rise" yeast, which usually comes in a packet of three with each envelope containing 2¼ teaspoons.

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Honey. It's worth noting that honey is sweeter than sugar, so it cannot be substituted in equal amounts. If your honey begins to crystallize, remove the jar lid, and heat the jar in the microwave in 10-second bursts until it begins to liquify.

Sugar. Sugar serves as a sweetener and tenderizer, and it turns baked goods into delicious products with a beautiful golden-brown exterior.

Granulated sugar is the most common sugar used in all these recipes.

Confectioners' sugar is powdered granulated sugar used in uncooked frostings and for dusting cakes and cookies.

Brown sugar is granulated sugar flavored with molasses. Dark brown sugar has more molasses and a stronger flavor than light brown sugar. Both these sugars need to be stored in airtight containers to retain their moistness. To measure brown sugar, pack it tightly into the measuring cup.

Maple Syrup. Pure maple syrup is available in various grades. Grade A is made earlier in the season and is lighter in color with a more delicate flavor. Grade B is made later in the season and has a stronger flavor. This is the grade that is used most often in baking. Store maple syrup in the refrigerator.

SAVVY BAKING TIPS

Don't measure ingredients over the mixing bowl. Place a flexible cutting board on the countertop and then measure your ingredients over that. Since baking is much more of a precise procedure, accidentally adding too much of one ingredient can have a detrimental effect on the final product. Measure ingredients off to one side and then add them to the mixing bowl.

Don't sift dry ingredients. Most flours have already been sifted, so there is no need for the additional step unless it is stated. Use a wire whisk to mix dry ingredients before slowly incorporating them with wet ingredients.

Use butter when it is called for. Don't substitute a spread or reduced-fat product for butter. Use only oils when they are specified, as well.

Temperature of ingredients. In general, it is best to have all ingredients at room temperature prior to starting a recipe. This includes eggs, butter, cream, and milk. When whipping egg whites, make sure the bowl is clean and dry and the egg whites are at room temperature. They will whip up and stiffen better than if they are cold. On the other hand, to whip up heavy cream, it works best when the bowl, beaters, and cream are chilled.

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muffins, loaves & more

BANANA CHOCOLATE WALNUT MUFFINS

Makes 24 muffins

2 eggs
¾ cup milk
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 cup mashed banana
3 cups all-purpose flour
1½ cups sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup unsalted butter, melted
1 cup diced banana
1 cup chopped walnuts
1 cup granola
1 cup shredded coconut
1 cup chocolate chips

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line 18 large muffin tins with paper liners and set aside.
2. In a mixing bowl, combine the eggs, milk, vanilla, and mashed bananas. Whisk to incorporate and set aside.
3. In a large separate bowl, add the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Mix on low until incorporated. Then add the melted butter. Continue to mix on low and add the egg and banana mixture. Scrape the bowl and blend well, but do not overmix. Next, fold into the batter the diced bananas, walnuts, granola, shredded coconut, and chocolate chips. Spoon the batter into the paper liners, filling each one to the top. Place in the oven and bake until the tops are golden brown, and a toothpick comes out clean, about 25 to 30 minutes.
4. Allow the muffins to cool slightly, remove them from the muffin tin to cool some more, and serve.

WHITE CHOCOLATE RASPBERRY SCONES

Makes 8 scones

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
⅓ cup + 1 tablespoon white sugar
½ cup cold unsalted butter, diced
½ cup sour cream
1 egg
1 cup fresh raspberries
½ cup white chocolate chips

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. In a large mixing bowl, add the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and sugar. Stir to combine the dry ingredients. Cut in the diced butter and continue until the mixture resembles a coarse meal. Set aside.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together the sour cream and egg. Then pour into the dry ingredients and stir until combined. The dough should be coarse and dry. Flour your hands and form the dough into a ball, being careful not to overwork it. We're after fluffy scones.
3. Place the dough ball on a flour-dusted countertop and lightly knead to form a circle about 7 inches wide. Then carefully add the fresh raspberries and chocolate evenly over the top of the dough. Gently knead the dough again so the raspberries and chocolate get blended throughout. During this process, the berries will begin to break down a bit, creating colorful swirls. Now, lightly knead again to form a circle about 7 inches wide. Using a pizza cutter, slice the dough into 8 wedges.

4. Transfer the scones to a cookie sheet and bake until light brown, about 16 or 17 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool slightly before serving.

BANANA BREAD

Makes 1 loaf

3–4 extremely ripe bananas
½ cup melted butter
2 large eggs
¼ cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ teaspoon salt
2 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 cup chopped walnuts
1 cup dark chocolate chips

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly grease a loaf pan with nonstick spray.
2. In a large mixing bowl, mash the bananas with a potato masher until almost smooth. Add the melted butter, eggs, sugar, and vanilla extract. Mix well to combine. Set aside.
3. In another bowl, add the salt, flour, baking soda, and baking powder. Mix well to combine, then add to the bowl with the mashed bananas. Add the chopped walnuts and chocolate and mix until well combined. Pour the batter into the prepared loaf pan.
4. Bake in the preheated oven for 1 hour, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean.
5. Remove from the oven and let the bread sit on the counter for about 5 to 10 minutes. Then transfer the loaf to a wire rack and allow to cool completely before serving.

LEMON CRUMB MUFFINS

Makes 12 muffins or 6 jumbo muffins

TOPPING:

⅓ cup + 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
3 tablespoons brown sugar, packed
2½ tablespoons granulated sugar
⅛ teaspoon salt
¼ cup melted butter

MUFFINS:

2 cups all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
¼ cup melted butter
½ cup granulated sugar
¼ cup lightly packed brown sugar
2 large eggs
1 cup plain Greek-style yogurt
1 teaspoon pure lemon extract
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
2 tablespoons fresh lemon zest

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F. Line a standard 12-count or jumbo 6-count muffin pan with cupcake liners.
2. Prepare the topping in a medium bowl by whisking together the flour, brown sugar, granulated sugar, and salt. Slowly add the melted butter and blend together until small crumbs form. Set aside.
3. To start the muffins, in a medium bowl, add the flour, baking soda, and salt. Whisk together until combined. Set aside.
4. In a large bowl, beat the butter on high. Add the granulated and brown sugars, and mix until light and fluffy. Add the eggs, yogurt, lemon, and vanilla extracts. Make sure to scrape down the sides of bowl when necessary. Next, add the "dry" ingredients from the medium bowl to the "wet" ingredients in the large bowl. Then add the lemon juice and lemon zest and fold in gently. The batter should be thick.
5. Divide the batter into the prepared muffin tins, filling about ¾ full. Top with the crumb topping, pressing it into the batter. Do this until each muffin is full.
6. Place muffins in the oven and bake for 5 minutes. Without opening the oven door, reduce the oven temperature to 350°F and bake for an additional 20 to 25 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the muffin comes out clean. Allow to cool slightly before serving.

TIP

Most recipes that yield 12 to 15 muffins will also make 6 jumbo muffins. The trick to getting perfect jumbo-style muffins each and every time is to bake up and not out. That means start the baking at a higher temperature and then, without opening the oven door, lower the temperature for the remainder of the baking. The higher temperature gets that initial rise started and then the lower temperature bakes the muffins more evenly.

PUMPKIN BREAD WITH CINNAMON STREUSEL

Makes 1 loaf

BATTER:

½ cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
1 cup granulated sugar
½ cup light brown sugar
1 egg
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
¼ cup sour cream
1 cup pumpkin
1½ cups all-purpose flour
¾ teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons baking powder
1½ teaspoons cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves

STREUSEL TOPPING:

¼ cup melted unsalted butter
2 tablespoons light brown sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 cup +/- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
¼ cup pecans chopped

MAPLE GLAZE:

½ cup powdered sugar
3 tablespoons maple syrup
½ teaspoon vanilla
milk, as needed

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a standard loaf pan with cooking spray.
2. In a large bowl, use a hand mixer to cream the butter and white and brown sugars. Add the egg, vanilla, sour cream, and pumpkin and mix until well combined. In a medium bowl, add the flour, salt, baking powder, cinnamon, and cloves and mix. Slowly add the dry ingredients to the mixer while running on low. Mix until a thick batter forms, then place the batter into the loaf pan.
3. To make the Streusel Topping, in a small bowl add the melted butter, brown sugar, and cinnamon and mix until smooth. Slowly add the flour into the mixture and mix until crumbly. Note: You may need to add a little extra flour if the mixture is too wet.
4. Sprinkle the streusel and chopped pecans over the pumpkin bread batter. Transfer to the preheated oven and bake for 60 to 70 minutes, or until a toothpick comes out clean. Remove from oven and leave to cool.
5. In a small bowl, add the ingredients for the Maple Glaze and stir to combine. Add in a few drops of milk is glaze isn't runny enough. Drizzle over cake and leave to cool an additional 10 minutes before serving.

TOASTED VANILLA GRANOLA

Makes about 4 cups

3 cups rolled oats
2 cups chopped nuts and/or seeds
1 teaspoon cinnamon
¼ cup coconut oil
⅓ cup maple syrup
1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract

1. Preheat the oven to 300°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. In a large mixing bowl, add the oats, nuts, seeds, and cinnamon. Stir.
3. In a small, microwave-safe bowl, add the coconut oil and microwave until melted, about 1 minute. Add the maple syrup, whisk to combine, and microwave again until warm, about another minute. Add the vanilla extract and whisk to combine.
4. Pour the "wet" ingredients over the "dry" ingredients in the bowl, and stir until all the oats, nuts, and seeds are completely covered. Then spread the mixture onto the prepared baking sheet. Spread out in one thin and even layer. Place in the oven and bake until the edges of the granola are just beginning to color, about 25 to 30 minutes.
5. Allow the granola to cool entirely before breaking it up into smaller pieces. Note: The granola will get crunchy as it cools. Store in an airtight container until ready to serve or enjoy immediately.

CHOCOLATE ZUCCHINI BREAD

Makes 1 loaf

- 2–3 small zucchinis
- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ⅓ cup Dutch process cocoa powder (like Hershey's Special Dark)
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup unsalted butter, melted
- 2 eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 4½ × 8½–inch loaf pan with nonstick baking spray. Then set aside. Note: You can also line the bottom of the pan with parchment or wax paper for easy removal after baking.
2. Wash the zucchini and trim off the ends. Use a box grater to grate the zucchinis (use the large grate), until you have approximately 1½ cups. Get two sheets of paper towel and place the grated zucchini between them and press out the excess water. You may need to do this a couple times to ensure the excess moisture is removed or you will end up with a soggy bread.
3. In a large mixing bowl, add the flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, salt, and brown sugar, then mix on low until incorporated. Then add the melted butter, eggs (one at a time), and vanilla extract. Continue to mix on low until you have a smooth, thick dough. Now, add the pressed zucchini and continue to mix on low until incorporated. Repeat with the chocolate chips.
4. Remove the dough mixture from the bowl and form into the prepared loaf pan. Place in the oven and bake until a clean toothpick comes out after inserted in the center, about 50 minutes to 1 hour.
5. Remove the loaf and allow to cool on wire rack for about 15 minutes. Then invert, remove the loaf pan, and let the loaf cool another 15 more minutes before slicing and serving.

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Easy Breads

ROSEMARY FOCACCIA

Makes 1 loaf

- 1⅓ cups very warm water
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 (0.25-ounce) package active-dry yeast
- 3½ cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt, plus more for finishing
- 2 sprigs fresh, chopped rosemary

1. Add the warm water and sugar to a large bowl. Stir to combine, then sprinkle the yeast on top of the water and stir again to combine. Let sit for 5 to 10 minutes until the yeast is foamy.
2. While mixing with a sturdy wooden spoon, work in small batches to add the flour, olive oil, and salt. Once ingredients incorporated, stir vigorously for 5 minutes.
3. Remove dough from the mixing bowl and use your hands to shape it into a ball. Grease the mixing bowl with cooking spray, then place dough back into the bowl and cover with a damp towel. Place in a warm location and let dough rise for 60 minutes, or until nearly doubled in size.
4. Turn dough onto a floured surface and roll into a large circle or rectangle until it's about ½ inch thick. Cover the dough again with a damp towel and let rise for another 20 minutes. Preheat oven to 400°F.
5. Use your fingers to poke deep dents all over the surface of the dough. Drizzle a tablespoon or two of olive oil evenly over the top of the dough and sprinkle with the fresh rosemary and kosher salt. Bake for 20 minutes, or until the dough is slightly golden and cooked through.
6. Remove from oven and drizzle with a little more olive oil. Let cool for 5 minutes, slice, and serve warm.

TIP

This British treat is a cross between an English muffin and a pancake. You bake them inside crumpet rings, but you can substitute egg rings or even very well cleaned-out tuna tins with bottoms removed.

CRUMPETS

Makes 7 crumpets

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour plus more for dredging
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon instant dry yeast
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1⅓ cups very warm water

1. In a large bowl, combine the flour, sugar, salt, yeast, and baking soda. Add the warm water and use an electric mixer to beat for 1 minute. Cover the bowl with a clean towel or plate and set in a warm place for 30 to 45 minutes. The mixture should be frothy on top.
2. Next, grease the inside of 3 or 4 crumpet or egg rings with a little butter and dip them in flour, tapping off the excess flour. Set aside.
3. Heat a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Place 2 or 3 of the rings into the pan and fill each with about ¼ cup of the batter. Allow to cook for 5 to 6 minutes, or until there is a ring of dry batter and bubbles bursting around the edge of the crumpets. Reduce the heat to medium-low and cook for another 5 to 6 minutes, or until all the bubbles have stopped popping. Remove the rings and gently flip the crumpets over and cook for 2 or 3 seconds—just enough to seal the tops. Remove the crumpets from the pan and allow to cool. Clean the rings and re-grease and flour. Repeat the previous steps for the remaining batter until all the crumpets are cooked.

SPICY BACON BREAD

Makes 1 loaf

8 ounces cream cheese, softened

¼ cup diced jalapeño (with seeds if you like extra heat)

2 cups cooked, chopped bacon

2 cups cheddar cheese

3 cups all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons granulated sugar

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1½ cups buttermilk

1. Preheat the oven 350°F.
2. Grease a 5 × 9–inch loaf pan with non-stick spray or butter.
3. In a large bowl, add the cream cheese, jalapeños, bacon, minus a handfull, and cheese. Stir to combine. In another bowl, add the flour, baking powder, salt, and sugar. Mix to combine. Now add the cream cheese mixture to the flour mixture, along with the vegetable oil and buttermilk. Mix until just combined.
4. Pour the batter into loaf pan, sprinkle with remaining bacon and transfer to the preheated oven. Bake for 50 to 55 minutes, or until the top is browned and a toothpick comes out clean when inserted into the center.
5. Remove the loaf from the oven and place on a wire rack to cool for about 5 minutes before serving.

GARLIC NAAN

Makes about 10 naans

DOUGH:

¼ cup warm water

2 teaspoons granulated sugar

1½ teaspoons instant yeast

¾ cup warm milk

¾ cup plain Greek yogurt

¼ cup vegetable oil + 2 tablespoons for cooking

2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced

4 cups all-purpose flour + more for dusting

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

BUTTER TOPPING:

3 tablespoons butter, melted

2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced

1 teaspoon chopped fresh cilantro

1. In a bowl, add the water, sugar, and yeast and stir to combine. Let sit for 5 to 10 minutes or until foamy. Add the milk, yogurt, ¼ cup of the oil, garlic, flour, baking powder, and salt. Mix until the dough comes together with your hands. Turn the dough out onto lightly floured surface. Use floured hands to knead the dough until smooth, 3 to 5 minutes. Lightly grease the same mixing bowl with cooking oil. Transfer the dough to the bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let rest at room temperature for about 1 hour or until doubled in size.
2. When ready to cook, divide the dough into 10 equal pieces. Roll into balls, then use a rolling pin to roll each piece of dough into a large oval. Heat a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Grease the skillet with ½ teaspoon of the extra oil. Place one piece of the naan in the oiled hot skillet and cook until bubbles form on top, 1 to 2 minutes. While cooking, brush the top with a little oil. Flip and cook for another 1 to 2 minutes, or until large golden spots appear on the bottom. Remove from the skillet and wrap in a clean kitchen towel. Repeat with the remaining naan. Note: Keep them wrapped in a towel while you work so they stay warm until you serve.
3. For the Butter Topping: Simply combine the melted butter, garlic, and cilantro and brush over the top of the cooked naan. Serve warm.

TIP

Traditional naan is an unleavened Indian bread. When dining in almost any Indian restaurant, you will find some type, or several types, of naan on the menu. This aromatic bread goes with Indian dishes, but also makes an afternoon snack you can dip into plain yogurt or other dips. Make sure the cast-iron skillet is preheated well to give the naan a nice crust.

PIZZA DOUGH

Makes 4 or 5 pizzas

1⅓ cups warm water
½ teaspoon active dry yeast
4 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons fine sea salt

1. In a large bowl, add the warm water and yeast. Stir to combine. Slowly add the flour while stirring and add the salt. Stir to combine. Let dough rest for 10 minutes to absorb the water and stir again until smooth. Note: If the dough is too sticky, sprinkle with small amounts of flour and stir just until it is no longer sticky.
2. Shape the dough into a ball and place into an oiled bowl. Cover with a kitchen towel. Let the dough rise in a warm location until doubled in size, about 1½ hours. Then punch and push the dough down to remove any air bubbles. Shape the dough into a ball again and divide into 4 to 5 pieces. Roll each piece into a ball.
3. Place dough balls on a baking sheet and dust with flour. Cover with a damp towel and allow to rest for 1 hour to become soft and elastic. Note: To achieve the ideal texture and flavor, cover the dough balls with plastic wrap and chill overnight. Remove from fridge at least 1 hour before baking to bring them back to room temperature.
4. Stretch out the dough on a floured work surface into a large circle no larger than 14 inches or it will tear. Place the dough circle onto the backside of a flat cookie sheet and top with your favorite toppings. Bake in a preheated 500°F oven until the crust is golden brown, about 12 to 16 minutes. Let cool for several minutes before slicing and serving.

TOMATO FOCACCIA

Makes 1 loaf

4 cups all-purpose flour
2¼ teaspoons instant yeast
2 teaspoons kosher salt, plus more for sprinkling
2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary leaves, plus more for sprinkling
2 cups warm water
1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil, divided
1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
Sea salt, as needed

1. In a large bowl, add the flour, yeast, salt, and rosemary. Mix on low to combine, then add the water and 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. Mix until a soft wet dough forms. Note: It will be very sticky.
2. Cover and let rise in a warm place for 40 minutes to 1 hour.
3. Preheat the oven to 425°F.
4. Turn the dough out onto a well-oiled half sheet pan, or line the pan with parchment paper or a silicone mat. Use your fingers to press out the dough into a large rectangle within the pan.
5. Place remaining olive oil in a small bowl and dip your fingers into it, then poke little dimples all over the bread, leaving little pools of oil. Do this all over the surface.
6. Arrange the tomatoes across the top, cut-side up, pressing them into the dough slightly, then scatter more chopped rosemary leaves evenly across the surface. Sprinkle sea salt over the dough.
7. Bake for 35 to 40 minutes, or until golden and crusty. Remove the bread from the pan and let cool on a rack before cutting into wedges and serving.

TIP

If you don't use buttermilk often, you can use either powdered buttermilk or add 1 tablespoon of white vinegar to 1 cup whole milk.

CHEESY BUTTERMILK QUICKBREAD

Makes 1 loaf

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons sugar
1½ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
1 cup buttermilk
1 egg
¼ cup melted butter
1 cup grated mozzarella cheese
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a loaf pan with cooking spray and set aside.
2. In a mixing bowl, add the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Whisk together until combined.
3. In a separate bowl, add the buttermilk and egg. Whisk together until combined. Then whisk in the melted butter. Now, add the buttermilk mixture to the flour mixture and combine. Then fold in the grated cheeses.
4. Transfer the mixture to the prepared loaf pan and bake in the preheated oven for 1 hour, or until a toothpick inserted in the center of the bread comes out clean. Remove from the oven and let rest for several minutes before serving.

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SPINACH TRIANGLES

Makes 18

3 teaspoons olive oil
¾ cup finely diced white onion
3 (10-ounce) packages frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
3 eggs
3 tablespoons dried parsley
6 teaspoons dried dill
¾ teaspoon salt
¾ teaspoon fresh cracked black pepper
1¼ cups crumbled feta cheese
16 sheets phyllo dough, thawed
¾ cup melted butter

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 9 × 13–inch pan and set it aside.
2. In a skillet, over medium-low heat, add the olive oil. When hot, add onion and cook until slightly browned. Add the spinach and stir to combine with the onion. Remove spinach mixture from the heat and set aside. Allow to cool to room temperature.
3. In a medium bowl, add the eggs, parsley, dill, salt, pepper, and feta cheese. Add in the spinach mixture and stir until combined. Set this aside.
4. Lay 1 phyllo sheet onto a greased baking pan. Brush melted butter on top of the sheet and up the sides. Do this for 8 phyllo sheets. Add the spinach filling on top in an even layer. Lay 1 phyllo sheet on top of the spinach mixture and brush melted butter on top of the sheet. Do this for 8 phyllo sheets. Cut (or score) it into 18 squares (or however big you want the pieces) prior to baking. Note: Phyllo is very fragile and crispy after it bakes, so this will allow you to portion it later without breakage.
5. Transfer pan to preheated oven and bake for 45 to 50 minutes, or until the top of the phyllo is golden brown. Remove from oven and let it sit for 5 minutes before serving.

CHEDDAR & CHIVE SCONES

Makes 8 scones

3 cups flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon salt
1½ cups sharp cheddar cheese, grated
½ cup fresh chives, finely chopped
2 cups heavy cream + more for brushing

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside.
2. In a mixing bowl, add the flour, baking powder, sugar, and salt. Mix well to combine, then add the cheese and chives. Stir the mixture thoroughly to combine. Then slowly pour in the cream and mix with a fork until a sticky dough clump forms. Knead the dough about 10 times and then press the ball onto a floured surface, pushing down until a circle about 8 inches in diameter is formed. The dough should be about ¾ inch thick.
3. Cut the dough into 8 triangles. Place the triangles onto the prepared baking sheet about 1 inch apart. Brush top with some additional cream and bake in the preheated oven for about 20 minutes, or until the scones are golden brown.

APPLE, ONION & BACON SCONES

Makes 8 scones

3 cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 teaspoon salt
½ cup cold unsalted butter
1 cup sautéed sweet onions
3 strips cooked bacon, roughly chopped
1 cup peeled, diced apples
1 cup buttermilk
1 egg
1 tablespoon cold water

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside.
2. In a mixing bowl, add the flour, baking powder, sugar, and salt. Whisk together until combined. Then make a well in the center of the dry ingredients. Shred the butter through a large-holed box grater held over the dry ingredients. Gently toss the butter shreds with the dry mixture, to coat. Next, fold in the sautéed onion, bacon, and apple pieces. Then pour in the buttermilk and stir gently until dough just comes together. The dough will be sticky. Scrape the dough onto the prepared baking sheet. Moisten your hands with a touch of cold water before lightly patting the dough into a level, 8-inch square. Dip a knife into the flour and carefully score the dough into triangles by making a cross through the center and second cross from corner to corner. To score, cut most of the way through the dough, but not entirely through to the bottom.
3. Create an egg wash by beating the egg with the cold water. Then brush the egg wash over top of the dough. Do not separate triangles.
4. Bake the scones in the preheated oven for 18 to 20 minutes, or until golden brown. Remove from the oven and allow to cool for several minutes on the baking sheet before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely. Before serving, cut the scones into wedges following the scored marks made prior to baking. The scones are best served warm.

PROSCIUTTO-ASPARAGUS PACKETS

Makes 16 packets

6 tablespoons whipped cream cheese
1 tablespoon Pecorino Romano cheese
1 tablespoon fresh grated Parmesan cheese + more for seasoning
1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
½ teaspoon granulated garlic powder
¼ teaspoon (or depending on your heat level) cayenne pepper
Salt and fresh cracked black pepper, to taste
1 package (17.3 ounces) thawed puff pastry sheets
8 slices prosciutto, cut in half
32 medium asparagus spears, washed and trimmed
sesame seeds, optional

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Prepare two baking sheets with parchment paper or grease the pans with olive oil.
2. In a bowl, add the cream cheese, Pecorino Romano and Parmesan cheese (or just double

the Parmesan), Italian seasoning, garlic powder, and cayenne. Mix until well combined and season with salt and pepper.

3. Roll out the puff pastry then spread the cheese spread evenly over each dough. Use a sharp knife to cut each cheese-topped dough into 8 even-sized squares. Working one square at a time, place a piece of prosciutto on the square and then top with 2-3 pieces of asparagus (spears and stalks). Fold in corners of dough like a blanket and gently pinch where they meet to seal. Transfer to baking sheet and repeat process until all dough is used.

4. Sprinkle top of each packet with black pepper, a little grated Parmesan, and, if you like, sesame seeds. Bake for 20-25 minutes, or until the crust turns light golden brown. Remove from oven and serve warm or at room temperature.

TIP

This is a fun twist on the traditional quiche. The hashbrowns offer a crisp and crunchy crust compared to dough. You can make your own hashbrowns from scratch or purchase storebought. Freezer hash browns at the supermarket work great for this recipe if you'd like to save a step.

HASH BROWN-CRUSTED QUICHE

Makes 6 to 8 slices

3 cups shredded potatoes
¼ cup melted butter
Salt, as needed, to taste
Fresh cracked black pepper, as needed, to taste
1 cup mild Italian pork sausage
6 large eggs
¼ cup heavy cream
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
1 cup shredded Monterey jack cheese
2 scallions, finely chopped

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Coat a 9-inch pie plate with nonstick cooking spray.
2. In a large bowl, gently toss the shredded potatoes with the melted butter to coat. Then season with salt and pepper. Press the hash browns into the bottom and up the sides of the plate to form a crust. Bake in the preheated oven for about 25 to 30 minutes, or until golden brown.
3. Meanwhile, sauté the ground sausage in a skillet over medium-high heat, breaking it up with a wooden spoon, until no longer pink, about 5 minutes. Set aside to cool.
4. In the large bowl you used for the hash browns, add the eggs, cream, cheeses, and scallions. Whisk to combine and season with salt and pepper. Add the cooked sausage crumbles. Mix to combine.
5. Pour the mixture on top of the hash brown crust. Bake for about 30 minutes or until set. Cut the quiche into wedges and serve immediately.

CHEESE PUFFS

Makes 18 puffs

¾ cup water
5 tablespoons unsalted butter
½ teaspoon salt
⅛ teaspoon fresh cracked black pepper
1 cup all-purpose flour
4 eggs
¾ cup grated mozzarella cheese
¼ teaspoon minced flat leaf (Italian) parsley
½ cup grated Parmesan cheese

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F. Line a baking sheet with a silicone sheet or parchment paper.
2. In a medium saucepan, add the water, butter, salt, and pepper and bring to a boil. Add the flour and stir until a dough forms. Cook another 2 minutes to dry the dough.
3. Transfer the dough to a bowl and let cool slightly. Slowly add the eggs, one at a time, stirring until well combined. Add the mozzarella cheese and parsley and mix well. Using 2 tablespoons, round each ball of dough and place onto the prepared parchment paper. Set them about 2 inches apart. Sprinkle some grated Parmesan cheese on top.
4. Bake in the preheated oven for 10 minutes, then reduce the oven temperature to 375°F. Bake an additional 15 to 20 minutes, or until golden brown. Remove from the oven and serve warm.

BALSAMIC MUSHROOM TARTS

Makes 10 tarts

7 ounces puff pastry dough, cut into 2 rectangles

5 ounces grated Gruyère cheese, plus extra for sprinkling

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 cups sliced cremini mushrooms

3 shallots, peeled and cut into rings

1 clove garlic, peeled and minced

½ teaspoon brown sugar

2 teaspoons soy sauce

2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

3 or 4 sprigs fresh thyme, plus extra for sprinkling

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Lay one puff pastry rectangle on a greased baking sheet and sprinkle it with a generous layer of cheese, leaving a border around the outside of the pastry without any cheese.

2. In a large skillet over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the mushrooms, shallots, garlic, brown sugar, soy sauce, and vinegar. Stirring often, let the mushroom mixture cook and soften for 8 to 10 minutes, or until the shallots soften and begin to caramelize. Remove from heat and stir in the thyme.

3. Use a slotted spoon to make 10 evenly spaced heaps of the mushroom mixture to the top of the cheese-topped pastry. Carefully top that with the other pastry rectangle, cup your hands and gently press around each mushroom mound.

4. Use a sharp knife to cut between the mounds (like you're making giant ravioli), and then crimp the edges of each pastry with a fork to seal it. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until the pastries are golden brown. Let rest for 5 minutes before serving.

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cookies & squares

CHOCOLATE ZUCCHINI BROWNIES

Makes 24 brownies

2 cups all-purpose flour
½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1½ teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
½ cup vegetable oil
1½ cups granulated sugar
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
2 cups shredded zucchini (pressed in paper towel to extract excess water)
3–5 tablespoons water
Semisweet chocolate chips, optional

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a 9 × 13–inch baking pan with foil and spray with cooking spray. Set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, add the flour, cocoa, baking soda, and salt. Whisk together to incorporate and set aside.
3. In a large bowl, pour in the oil, sugar, and vanilla, and use a wooden spoon to mix well until combined. Add in the "dry" ingredients and stir. Fold in the zucchini. Let the mixture sit for several minutes so the batter can absorb the moisture from the zucchini. Note: If the mixture is powdery, add up to 5 tablespoons of water. Start with 1 tablespoon and work up from there, stirring well after each addition. The batter should be thick and not powdery. Spread the dough in prepared pan. Sprinkle the top with chocolate chips, if desired.
4. Bake 25 for 30 minutes, or until the brownies spring back when gently touched. Remove from the oven and let cool slightly before serving.

ITALIAN ALMOND COOKIES

Makes 2 dozen cookies

2 egg whites
½ teaspoon fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon fresh orange zest
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 tablespoon almond extract
2¼ cups almond flour
2¼ cups powdered sugar, divided
¼ teaspoon salt

1. In a large bowl, add the egg whites and lemon juice and whip with a mixer until stiff peaks form. Gently fold in the orange zest, vanilla, and almond extracts until combined. Set aside.
2. In another bowl, add the almond flour, 1¾ cups of powdered sugar, and salt. Mix together and sift into the egg whites, folding gently until combined. The mixture will form a sticky dough rather than a fluffy meringue.
3. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Roll out the dough into 1-inch balls. Roll each ball into the remaining ½ cup powdered sugar, until well coated. Arrange balls on a baking sheet with some space between them for spreading and flatten slightly with the back of a spoon. Leave the balls uncovered at room temperature until the tops have dried out and almost formed a "shell," about 1 hour (this may take longer in humid climates).
4. Preheat the oven to 300°F.
5. When the cookies have dried, place them in the preheated oven. Bake for 20 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool before serving.

CHOCOLATE SNOWBALL COOKIES

Makes 3 dozen snowballs

1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature

1½ cups powdered sugar, divided

¼ cup cocoa powder

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

2 cups all-purpose flour

½ teaspoon salt

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Prepare two baking sheets lined with parchment paper or a silicone sheet.
2. In a mixing bowl, add the butter, ½ cup powdered sugar, cocoa, and vanilla. Mix with an electric mixer until fluffy. Add the flour and salt and mix until the dough comes together. Let the dough cool in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes.
3. Scoop 1 tablespoon of the dough and roll around in the remaining cup of powdered sugar then place on the prepared baking sheet. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes and then let cool on the cookie sheet for an additional 5 minutes before transferring to wire rack to cool completely.

LEMON BARS

Makes 12 bars

½ cup cold butter

1 cup + 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour, divided

¼ cup powdered sugar

1 cup granulated sugar

½ teaspoon baking powder

2 eggs

1 lemon, juiced and zested

¾ cup powdered sugar

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. In a mixing bowl, add the butter, 1 cup flour, and powdered sugar and cut together until incorporated. Then, using your fingers, press the crust mixture into an 8 × 8–inch pan.
3. Place the pan in the preheated oven and bake the crust for 15 minutes. Then remove.
4. In another mixing bowl, add the remaining 2 tablespoons flour along with the sugars and baking powder. Mix well until combined and then add the eggs, lemon juice, and lemon zest. Mix well to combine, then pour the mixture into the baked crust. Place the pan back in the oven and bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until the edges are golden brown and the mixture is set. It will still jiggle a bit but will firm up as it cools.
5. Remove the bars from the oven and use a fine mesh strainer to dust powdered sugar over them while they're still warm. Let the bars cool before cutting and serving.

TIP

If you like the look of traditional Linzer cookies with those fun little designs, they sell pre-made Linzer cookie cutters at places like Michaels and online at Amazon. Most of the sets have interchangeable shapes for the smaller "windows" inside.

LINZER COOKIES

Makes 2 dozen cookies

1 cup butter

cup granulated sugar

1 egg

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

¼ teaspoon almond extract

2 cups all-purpose flour

cup almond flour

¼ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon cinnamon

Powdered sugar, as needed

½ cup strawberry or raspberry jam

1. In a large bowl, use a mixer to cream the butter and sugar. Scrape down the bottom and sides of the bowl while mixing. Add the egg, vanilla extract, and almond extract, and continue to mix until combined.
2. In a separate bowl, add the flour, almond flour, salt, and cinnamon. Whisk until combined, then add to the butter mixture. Divide into two equal parts. Shape into discs and flatten. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 2 hours.
3. Roll the dough into ⅛-inch thickness. Cut equal number of rounds, using a cookie cutter. Transfer to a parchment paper–lined baking sheet. If you'd like the top cookie to have a cutout, use a knife or a small cookie cutter to make a shape in half of the cookies. Refrigerate for 30 minutes.
4. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
5. Bake the cookies for 10 to 12 minutes, or until the edges are golden. Cool the cookies for 2 minutes on the baking sheet, then transfer to a cooling rack. Dust the top parts with powdered sugar, then add about 1 teaspoon of jam to the bottom of halves and sandwich together with the tops.

FROSTED PUMPKIN SQUARES

Makes 12 to 18 squares

PUMPKIN SQUARES:

4 eggs

2 cups granulated sugar

1 cup vegetable oil

1 (15-ounce) can pumpkin purée

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons baking soda

1 teaspoon cinnamon

½ teaspoon nutmeg

½ teaspoon ground ginger

½ teaspoon salt

CREAM CHEESE FROSTING:

8 ounces softened cream cheese

8 ounces softened butter

2 cups powdered sugar

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9 × 13–inch baking pan and set aside.
2. In a large bowl, add the eggs, sugar, oil, and pumpkin. Mix until well combined. In a separate bowl, add the flour, baking soda, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and salt. Whisk until combined. Then add the "dry" ingredients to the "wet" egg mixture and gently stir until well combined. Pour batter into greased pan, then bake for 28 to 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.
3. To make the frosting, use a mixer to beat the cream cheese and butter on high until smooth. Beat in the powdered sugar and vanilla until smooth and fluffy. Do not overbeat or it will separate.
4. Remove from the oven and allow to cool completely. Once cooled, spread the Cream Cheese Frosting on top, cut into squares, and serve.

TIP

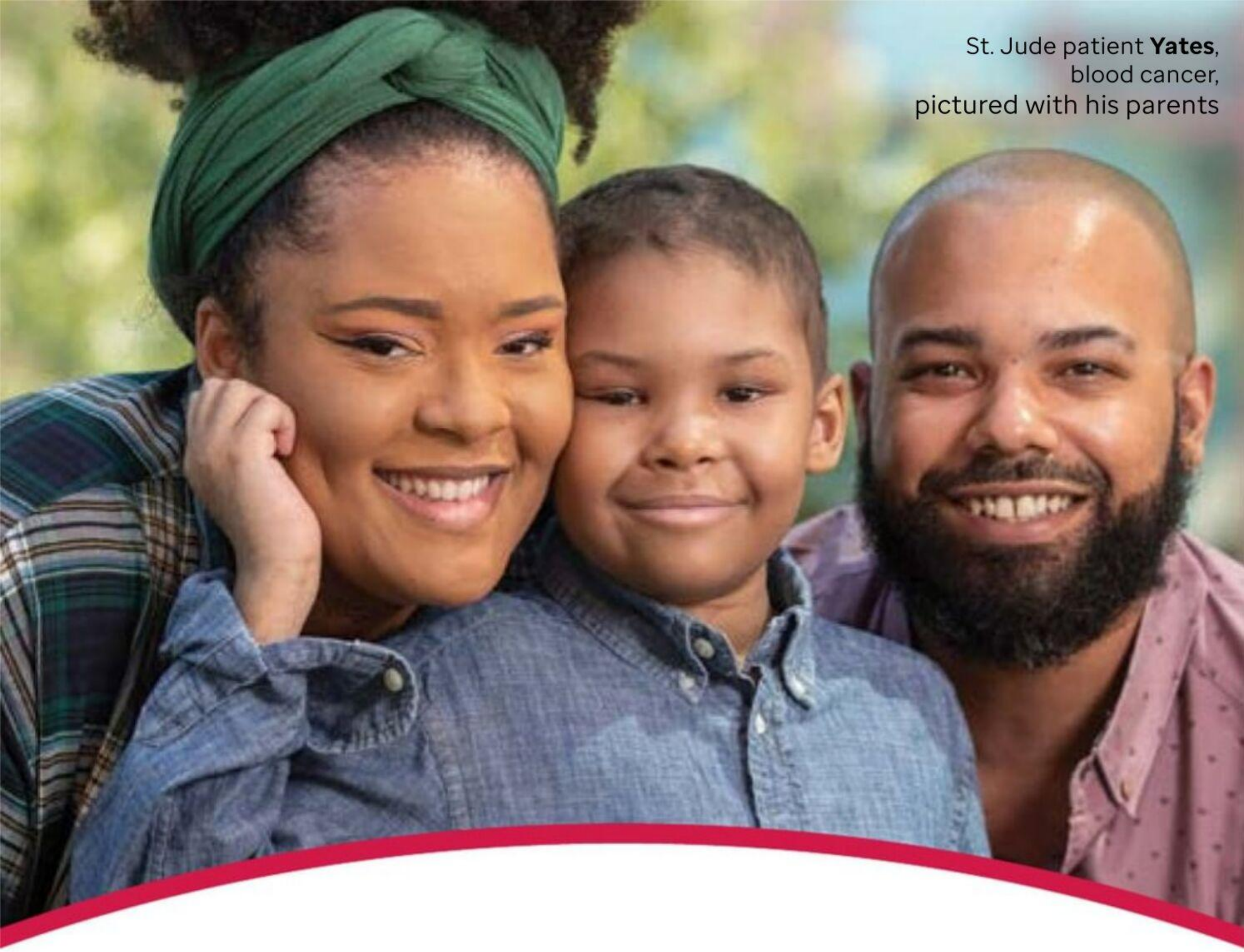
Like traditional fire-roasted s'mores, these taste great when warm. To keep them crisp, you can quickly reheat them for 3 minutes in a 400˚F oven or about 1 minute in an air fryer.

S'MORES COOKIES

Makes 4 dozen

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup graham cracker crumbs
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 dash cinnamon
- 1 cup butter, softened
- ¾ cup sugar
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups miniature chocolate chips
- 1½ cups mini marshmallows
- 2 Hershey's bars, chopped

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. In a medium bowl, combine the flour, graham cracker crumbs, baking soda, salt, and dash of cinnamon.
3. In a large bowl, beat together the butter, sugar, brown sugar, and vanilla extract until creamy. Add the eggs one at a time until well mixed. Slowly beat in the flour mixture until smooth. Stir in the chocolate chips.
4. Drop by rounded tablespoon onto ungreased cookie sheet. Bake for 8 minutes and remove from the oven. Push 3 to 4 marshmallows and a few pieces of Hershey bar into each cookie. Return to the oven and bake an additional 3 to 4 minutes until fully cooked. Cool cookies on a wire rack.



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All-time classics

CARROT CAKE WITH ULTIMATE CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

Serves 10 to 12

CAKE:

3 cups flour
1 tablespoon baking soda
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1½ teaspoons salt
1¼ cups vegetable oil
⅔ cup unsweetened applesauce
1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
1¼ cups sugar
1¾ cups brown sugar
6 large eggs
3 cups shredded carrot

ULTIMATE CREAM CHEESE FROSTING:

16 ounces (2 8-ounce bricks) softened cream cheese
1 cup melted butter
1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
¼ teaspoon salt
8 cups powdered sugar
Chopped pecans, as needed, optional

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease and flour three 9-inch cake pans.
2. In a medium bowl, add the flour, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt. Whisk until combined. In a large bowl, cream together the oil, applesauce, vanilla, sugar, and brown sugar. Mix in the eggs, one at a time, then stir in carrots. Next, mix the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients until combined. Pour the mixture into the prepared cake pans.
3. Bake for 35 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Turn the cakes out onto cooling racks and allow to cool completely.
4. To make the frosting, in a large bowl cream together the cream cheese and butter. Mix in the vanilla and salt. Add the powdered sugar, 1 cup at a time, mixing after each, until frosting is smooth and fluffy.
5. Assemble the cake by spreading the frosting on top of the first layer, then stacking on another layer and repeating the frosting, then add last layer. Spread the frosting around the sides of the cake. Gently press chopped pecans into the cake sides, if using, and serve.

MOLTEN LAVA CAKES

Makes 4 cakes

½ cup unsalted butter
6 ounces bittersweet chocolate
2 eggs
2 egg yolks
¼ cup sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1. Preheat the oven to 450°F. Butter and lightly flour four ramekin dishes (6-ounce size preferred). Tap out the excess flour. Set the ramekins on a baking sheet.
2. In a double boiler over simmering water, slowly melt the butter with the chocolate. In a medium bowl, beat the eggs with the egg yolks, sugar, and salt at high speed until thick and pale.
3. Whisk the chocolate until smooth. Quickly fold it into the egg mixture along with the flour. Spoon the batter into the prepared ramekins and bake for 12 minutes, or until the sides of the cakes are firm but the centers are soft.
4. Let the cakes cool in the ramekins for 1 minute, then cover each with an inverted dessert plate. Carefully turn each one over, let stand for 10 seconds, and then unmold. Serve immediately.

CINNAMON ROLL COFFEE CAKE

Serves 12

CAKE:

½ cup melted butter
2 large eggs
1 cup granulated sugar
3 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
4 teaspoons baking powder
¼ teaspoon salt
1½ cups whole milk

TOPPING:

1 cup melted butter
1 cup brown sugar
2 tablespoons flour
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon

GLAZE:

2 cups powdered sugar
5 tablespoons milk
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 350°
2. In a large bowl, mix all the cake ingredients together until well combined. Pour into a greased 9 × 13–inch pan.
3. For Topping, mix all the ingredients together in a small bowl until well combined. Spread evenly on the batter and swirl with a knife.
4. Bake at 350°F for 30 to 35 minutes.
5. For Glaze, mix all the ingredients together in a small bowl until it is a consistency like pancake syrup. Drizzle glaze over cake while still warm. Serve warm or room temperature.

ZESTY LEMON BUNDT CAKE

Serves 10 to 12

3 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon salt
1 cup unsalted butter, softened
2 cups sugar
3 eggs
½ cup sour cream
4 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 teaspoon fresh ginger, minced
2 tablespoons lemon zest
½ cup buttermilk

LEMON GLAZE:

1½ cups powdered sugar
3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
Additional lemon zest for decoration

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Generously coat a Bundt pan with cooking spray.
2. In a mixing bowl, sift the flour, baking powder, and salt and set aside. In another bowl, cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs, one at a time. Mix in the sour cream, lemon juice, vanilla, ginger, and lemon zest. Mix half of the flour mixture into the butter mixture. Mix in the buttermilk and add the remaining flour mixture. Mix just until the flour disappears. Pour batter into Bundt pan.
3. Bake for 70 to 80 minutes, or until a knife inserted in the center of the cake comes out clean. Remove the cake from the oven and allow to cool for 5 minutes. Turn the cake over on a cake platter and let cool.
4. Make the glaze. In a mixing bowl, add the powdered sugar. Then whisk in the lemon juice until the mixture is smooth. The glaze should be pourable but not runny. Pour glaze over cooled cake and top with additional fresh lemon zest. Serve.

CHOCOLATE LAYER CAKE

Serves 10 to 12

CAKE:

1¾ cups all-purpose flour

2 cups granulated sugar

¾ cup cocoa powder

2 teaspoons baking soda

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

1 cup buttermilk (or half-and-half)

½ cup vegetable oil

2 large eggs

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1 cup hot coffee

FROSTING:

6 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped

1 cup unsalted butter, room temperature

3 cups powdered sugar, sifted

¼ teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

½ cup sour cream

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter two 8-inch round cake pans and line the bottoms with parchment paper discs.
2. Whisk all the dry ingredients together well in a large bowl. In a separate bowl, whisk together all the wet ingredients except the coffee. Slowly add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients, mixing as you go. Once incorporated, add the hot coffee, and mix everything until there are no pockets of dry flour left. The batter will be very thin.
3. Divide the batter between the two cake pans and bake for 35 minutes until risen and a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Allow the cakes to partially cool in the pans, then turn out onto a cooling rack to completely cool before frosting and serving.
4. For the frosting, melt the chocolate in a double boiler. Stir until smooth and set aside to cool slightly. Beat the room temperature butter in the bowl of a stand mixer with the paddle attachment for a couple minutes until smooth and noticeably paler in color. Slowly add the powdered sugar, salt, and vanilla, beating on a low-medium speed until everything is smooth. Whisk the sour cream into the partially cooled melted chocolate. Add the chocolate and sour cream mixture to the mixer bowl and beat on low speed until everything is smooth and combined. If the frosting seems a little too loose, refrigerate for 10 to 15 minutes to allow it to firm up a little.

LEMON CUSTARD CAKE

Makes 1 (8 × 8–inch) cake

4 eggs, separated
¾ cup sugar
½ cup unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
¾ cup all-purpose flour
¼ cup fresh lemon juice (about 2 lemons)
1¾ cups lukewarm milk
Powdered sugar, as needed, for dusting

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Line an 8 × 8-inch baking dish with parchment paper, leaving overhang along the sides. Lightly grease with cooking spray and set aside.
2. In a mixing bowl, whip the egg whites until stiff peaks form and set aside. In another bowl, beat the egg yolks and sugar until pale yellow. Add the melted butter and vanilla and mix until combined. Add the flour and mix until evenly incorporated. Add the lemon juice and mix until combined. Slowly beat in the milk until well combined. Next, add the egg whites and whisk by hand. Don't fold in completely; leave some small egg white lumps. When you pour the batter into the pan, the lumps will float to the surface and create the top layer during baking.
3. Pour the thin batter into the pan and bake for 40 to 60 minutes, checking after 35 minutes, until the cake is barely jiggly in the center but the top is firm to the touch. Baking time may vary depending on your oven. Do not overbake or the cake will turn out rubbery and not custardy in the center. Once cake has cooled, dust with the powdered sugar and serve.

OLD-FASHIONED APPLE PIE

Serves 8

CRUST:

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon baking powder

⅔ cup butter-flavored shortening

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

4–5 tablespoons milk

FILLING:

½–1 cup sugar, depending on apple tartness

4 tablespoons cornstarch

½ teaspoon ground nutmeg

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

¼ teaspoon salt

5 cups thinly sliced peeled tart apples (about 4 or 5 medium-sized apples)

2 tablespoons butter

1. Begin by making the crust. In a large mixing bowl, add the flour, salt, and baking powder, and mix well. Cut in the shortening until the mixture resembles small peas. Drizzle in the oil then the milk, 1 tablespoon at a time, tossing with a fork after each addition. When the dough is thoroughly mixed, remove the dough and press firmly together with your hands as you would a snowball. Divide the dough into two balls, then roll out each piece on a lightly floured surface. Place the bottom crust into a 9-inch pie pan and set aside.

2. To make the filling, in a mixing bowl, add the sugar, cornstarch, nutmeg, cinnamon, salt, and the apples. Mix well until combined, then let stand at room temperature for at least 30 minutes.

3. Preheat the oven to 425°F.

4. Add the apple mixture to the dough-lined pan and dot with butter. Cover the pan with the top crust, seal, and crimp the edges. With a knife, slit a couple steam vents in the top crust and cover the edges with aluminum foil to prevent overbrowning.

5. Transfer the pie to the preheated oven and bake for 25 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for an additional 15 minutes. Remove the pie from the oven and let rest for 15 minutes before serving.

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Allison was bawling, she turned to me and said, ‘Mom, I got a D.’ It was the first time she called me ‘Mom.’

Lisa, adopted 16-year-old Allison

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RED VELVET CUPCAKES WITH CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

Makes 24 cupcakes

CAKE:

2½ cups flour

1½ cups sugar

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 tablespoon cocoa powder

1 teaspoon salt

2 large eggs

1½ cups vegetable oil

1 cup buttermilk

2 tablespoons (1 ounce) red food coloring

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1 teaspoon white distilled vinegar

Red, white & blue stars, or other decorative topping, optional

CREAM CHEESE FROSTING:

8 ounces softened cream cheese

8 ounces softened butter

2 cups powdered sugar

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a muffin tin with cupcake liners and set aside.

2. In a medium bowl, add the flour, sugar, baking soda, cocoa powder, and salt. Mix until well combined. In a large bowl, add the eggs, oil, buttermilk, food coloring, vanilla extract, and vinegar. Use a mixer to beat until well incorporated. Next, add the dry ingredients to the bowl and beat until smooth, about 2 minutes. Divide the batter evenly among the lined muffin cups, filling about ¾ of the way. Bake for 16 to 18 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the centers comes out clean.

3. To make the frosting, in a large bowl, use a hand mixer to beat the cream cheese and butter on high until smooth. Beat in the powdered sugar and vanilla until smooth and fluffy. Do not overbeat. Set aside.

4. Remove cupcakes from the oven and allow to cool completely before frosting and decorating with your favorite toppings.